

1202

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE

other names/site number Clewiston Theater

2. Location

street & number 100 E. Sugarland Highway N/A not for publication

city or town Clewiston N/A vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Hendry code 051 zip code 33440

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 8/7/98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) _____

[Signature] 9.25.98
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE

Name of Property

Hendry County, Florida

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Name of related multiple property listings
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Movie Theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Movie Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Concrete
roof Tar & Gravel
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Criteria A, B, C, and D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- Criteria A through G with checkboxes and descriptions.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, previously listed, landmark, survey, engineering record.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1941-1948

Significant Dates

1941

Significant Person

Davis, Mary Hayes

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arch.: Cone, C.A.

Blder.: Earl Anderson Contracting Co.

Primary location of additional data:

- Location checkboxes: State Historic Preservation Office, Other State Agency, Federal agency, Local government, University, Other.

Name of Repository

#

DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE
Name of Property

Henry County, Florida
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	5	0	6	5	2	0	2	9	5	9	0	0	0
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
2															

3															
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
4															

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mikki Hartig, Consultant/Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date August 1988

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Hatfield

street & number 818 W. Royal Palm Avenue telephone (941) 983-2601

city or town Clewiston state Florida zip code 33440

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE
HENDRY COUNTY

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Dixie Crystal Theatre in Clewiston, Florida, is one-story movie theater completed in early 1941. It is one of the few known examples of the Moderne style of architecture in Hendry County, Florida. The concrete block building, surfaced with stucco, rests on a concrete slab foundation. A flat roof covers the main block of the essentially rectangular building. The theater largely retains its historic architectural integrity. It was built for Mary Hayes Davis, a prominent local business and newspaper woman, who also owned and operated a chain of movie theaters in south Florida and the Lake Okeechobee region of the state during the first half of the twentieth century.

SETTING

The Dixie Crystal Theatre is located at 100 E. Sugarland Highway, in downtown Clewiston, a city located in the interior of Hendry County on the southwest shore of Lake Okeechobee, 61 miles west of Palm Beach and 62 miles east of Fort Myers. It is the larger of two incorporated cities in Hendry County, the other being LaBelle. The Dixie Crystal Theatre (now called The Clewiston Theater) is located on the south side of Sugarland Highway (U.S. Highway 27 and State Road 80) at the east corner of its intersection with Central Avenue, directly opposite the city park. The building stands in a prominent location along the city's busiest thoroughfare in close proximity to the business district and is located approximately within one block of the 1938 Clewiston Inn (NR 1991). U.S. Highway 27 bisects the city. Clewiston, known as America's "sweetest town," because of its strong historical link to sugar cane production, lies on the fringe of the Everglades agricultural area. Paved roads link Clewiston with all areas on the east and west coasts and to the central part of the state. The city is the fastest growing municipality in Hendry County and is home to the United States Sugar Corporation and a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Station. There has been and continues to be significant commercial development along Sugarland Highway because it is a main cross-state traffic artery, making it the ideal location for such activity.

EXTERIOR

The 45 X 93 foot, one-story building is a simplified version of the Moderne style, with most of the stylistic details limited to the main (north) facade and that portion of the side elevations immediately next to it. Except for the facade, which is markedly vertical in emphasis, the overall feeling of the building is strongly horizontal, most of the space being devoted to the flat-roofed auditorium. The front of the building comprises a series of tall, shallow pavilions advancing and receding in space, embracing the plain, rectangular building behind it only at the corners (Photos 1-4).

The present paint scheme of this flat-roofed, stucco clad, masonry motion picture theater emphasizes copings, other trims, and regularly-spaced buttresses on the west and east walls. The core building is rectangular. Its slightly larger north block wraps around the core, with west and east parapets that step back as they progress south. The north

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block is relatively free of ornament, except for unpainted red "Cuban" brick parapet and wall trim emphasizing its overall horizontal design while placing vertical emphasis on the entry (Photos 1 & 2). The character of the north block is largely a result of its form. It is symmetric, with a centrally located curvilinear wall and squared end walls slightly recessed behind projecting walls on either side, themselves embellished with subtly curved outside edges.

The original silver metallic marquee extends over the box office that separates paired, contemporary glass entrance doors (Photos 1, 2 & 4). The box office is surfaced with original ceramic tile that also forms a low water table on the north facade, once again emphasizing the entrance. Overall, the features do not combine to form the smooth lines applicable to the Streamline subtype of the Moderne style that became popular in the Depression era. It does, however, remain a minimal regional example of the Art Moderne style.

INTERIOR

In 1996, the interior space of the main auditorium was divided in two in order to provide a two screen theater for the showing of two different movies. The interior space does include the original balcony, but, because it was not designed for live entertainment, the theater has only a narrow eight foot stage and no orchestra pit. An article appearing in the Clewiston News, on October 25, 1940 described the interior space in detail and reads:

Entrances are arranged from the foyer into the offices in the northwest corner [now a video arcade room] into the ladies rest rooms on the west side and into the gentlemen's restroom on the east side. In front of these rooms are staircases leading to the balcony. The auditorium is 35 feet by 60 feet and will have a seating capacity of five hundred. A solid partition separates the auditorium from the foyer except for the double width doors at the two aisles [since removed]. The interior finish of the auditorium will be a special type of acoustical celotex. Concealed fluorescent light will be used and forced air ventilation. [It has a] narrow eight foot stage. Exits are provided on either side in front of the stage and utility rooms will be built in the corners. The projection room will be fireproofed with steel and concrete walls and concrete floor.

The interior plan has a symmetrical front lobby, sloped floor within the viewing rooms, a motion picture projection screen, and a projection booth above. The floor plan, with the exception of the division of the main auditorium is as originally planned and executed. The theater seats are not original but taken from another theater and installed in 1996. Wood paneling has been installed over original Celotex walls in the theater lobby and the ceiling has been dropped to accommodate ACV ductwork. Original Art Moderne style wall sconces remain in place on the interior of each of the two original side walls of the auditorium. Original oak handrails remain in place on each of the two stairways to the balcony.

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ALTERATIONS

This building has only two apparent exterior alterations: the c.1980 addition of a one-story south shed roofed storage room (Photos 5-8), and the enclosure of two window openings on the east and west elevations at ground level near the front facade. Interior changes include the replacement of the original theater seats, and the installation of wood paneling and drop acoustic tile ceilings in the theater lobby.

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DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE
HENDRY COUNTY
SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The Dixie Crystal Theatre in Clewiston, Florida, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under **Criteria A, B, and C** for its significance in the area of **Recreation and Entertainment, Architecture, and its association with Mary Hayes Davis**, a prominent businesswoman in Hendry and Glades Counties and South Florida during the 1920s-1940s. The 500 seat theater has remained in continuous use as a motion picture theater since its completion in early 1941, and has been the only theater in operation in Hendry County for over 30 years. It is the only building constructed in the Art Moderne style in Clewiston, and is one of only two constructed in either incorporated city of Hendry County. Its exterior has been only minimally altered since its completion.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The area of land that would make up the future town site of Clewiston was, with the exception of the elevated ridge at Sand Point, a barren site. The Clewiston area was at one time a campsite for Indians who fished the bass-laden waters of Lake Okeechobee. Following the construction of the Disston Canal in 1883, the ridge section of Clewiston, shaped like an anvil and jutting into Lake Okeechobee, was known as Sand Point. The area was considered a beach and began to be commonly identified as Sugarloaf Beach in the last years of the 1890s. A small lagoon with a narrow channel was located nearby. The earliest enterprise in the area was commercial fishing in 1914 with nearby quarters for periodic use by fishing crews. The earliest settlers were a dozen Japanese from California who had been recruited by not-so-scrupulous land promoters. These colonists from Japan came and cleared land for farming in 1915. The only others to come to the area were an occasional fisherman and hunters who came to camp in season.

The first significant settlement of the town of Clewiston was undertaken in 1921 and 1922 by John J. O'Brien and his wife and partner, Marian Horowitz O'Brien. In about 1920, they sought financing from Alonzo C. Clewis, president of the Exchange National Bank in Tampa. With his interest and financial backing secured, the O'Briens purchased a tract of land from the State of Florida and an additional \$12,000 worth of land from the South Florida Land Company for the establishment of a new city. Clewis was honored by the name chosen by the O'Briens for their new development, Clewiston.

Prior to their efforts to establish Clewiston, the O'Briens were deeply involved in the development of nearby Moore Haven. Mrs. O'Brien became that city's first mayor in 1917, which earned her the place of the first female mayor south of the Mason-Dixon line and perhaps in the United States. Her election received national attention. Within a short time, the O'Briens also established another new settlement nearby, Newhall. After encountering some labor difficulties in Moore Haven, they abandoned that town and set out to develop a new town, Clewiston. This was to be an extremely well planned city on the Sand Point Shore, fifteen miles southeast of Moore Haven. The site chosen had a sandy beach, wooded ridge and fertile "muck" soil. Many farmers moved towards Lake Okeechobee in the first

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two years of the 1920s, believing that the Everglades had been drained and that there was no longer any fear of flooding, such as previously been experienced in areas all around the lake. These farmers were incorrect in their belief because the dryness of the area was only the result of a particularly long dry spell. Moore Haven continued to be the commercial and population center of the area. At that time it had a railroad and active promoters, although several families did venture to settle eastward from the town. By 1922, there were approximately fifteen families in this area but few roads had been built.

One of the first projects undertaken by the O'Briens in their development plans for the new town of Clewiston was the completion of a railroad in 1920, the Moore Haven and Clewiston, an extension from the Atlantic Coast Line terminus at Moore Haven to Sand Point, making the new settlement the new end of the line for the A.C.L. This spur was the first railroad ever to be built in the Everglades. By the time the railroad reached Clewiston in 1921, the entire Clewiston population consisted of a few native Florida families. Some local land was drained for farming and Clewiston became recognized as a shipping point for locally grown vegetable crops, especially tomatoes. Regrettably, at the time when there was a promise of new growth, the town was faced with a lengthy period of rain that destroyed the crops of the new settlers, causing them to move elsewhere and start again. Flooding remained a recurrent problem.

John J. and Marian O'Brien had a strong commitment to the future of Clewiston. J.J. O'Brien chartered a boat and invited several wealthy investors from Ft. Myers to give them a tour of Lake Okeechobee and entice them to invest in Clewiston's growth. Three of O'Brien's passengers on one excursion, Alfred H. Wagg, D.F. Dunkle, and Bert Winters, all from Palm Beach, were persuaded to invest. As a result, the Clewiston Development Company was formed and the Clewiston Bank was established.

In 1923, the O'Briens and Clewis hired John Nolen, the country's premier land planner at the time, to formally lay out a city for a fee of \$10,000. Nolen was encouraged to develop a plan for a resort city with an agricultural-related industrial area. Over the next eight years, Nolen made several visits to the city.

During the early years of the 1920s, the O'Briens entertained a number of important parties at their home in Clewiston, including Thomas A. Edison, but within only a few years, the O'Briens began to experience labor problems and religious prejudice causing them to leave that city. Shortly thereafter, they sold or released their land holdings to Wagg, Dunkle, and Winters, who also purchased Clewis's stock holdings. Within a short period of time, the O'Briens also sold the Moore Haven-Clewiston Railroad to the Atlantic Coastline Railroad and soon left Florida permanently.

With the departure of the O'Briens, what seemed like a promising future for Clewiston could have dissolved if not for other keen investors who made an inquiry into their property at about the same time. From that point on, Clewiston became clearly a company town. A group of prominent and wealthy Kansas City and St. Louis men had purchased 70,000 acres west and south of Clewiston and, when the town site became available and they saw additional

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opportunity, they purchased the O'Brien's former land holdings from Wagg, Dunkle, and Winters. The new investment group formed Clewiston, Ltd.

In 1922, following severe flooding in the Clewiston area, the investment group dispatched Captain F. Deane Duff, as their representative, to inspect their local land holdings. Duff reported that he saw prospects for the property if the investors were willing to expend additional funds. By this time, the group had become acquainted with another wealthy party, Bror G. Dahlberg, a native of Sweden. Dahlberg was the president of the Celotex Company of Chicago, which produced wallboard from bagasse, the residue of sugar cane after the juice is removed. The Celotex Company was in need of raw material for production of this product. F.E. Bryant, accompanied Dahlberg to Canal Point to inspect the investment group's land holdings and sugar cane fields. As a result, Dahlberg was convinced to join Cook, Brown, and Bixby in establishing a sugar cane mill near Clewiston. By 1924, they had made considerable additional purchases of former O'Brien land holdings from Wagg, Dunkle and Winters and then formed the Southern Sugar Company. The corporation received its charter in December, 1925 with a capitalization of \$11,000,000.

On October 16, 1925, Judge J.L. Doggett of Jacksonville, Assistant General Manager of Clewiston, Ltd., and Jacob K. Harum, had officially filed the plat map of Clewiston. The town site included 10,000 lots and was "to embody the best in ideas in modern civic organization and was planned for 50,000 people."

Although Dahlberg's primary interest had been the production of bagasse, he shortly turned his interest and effort towards the production of sugar. Dahlberg then became the sugar company's number one promoter working for the acquisition of large tracts of land in the area and around the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee, interacting with state and local officials in advancing drainage facilities, as well as acquiring funding to finance such projects. Plans were made for the organization of a local sales campaign for the sale of Clewiston lots. Mr. McGready was named general sales agent for the Clewiston town site. In 1925, when John Nolen's general plan for Clewiston was completed, maps of the plan were copied and distributed to real estate salesmen. Promotional advertisements were placed in northern newspapers calling Clewiston "the great four million dollar town site development where lots are selling for \$2,000-\$8,000 each." Within a short time, \$500,000 worth of lot reservations were made and the town began to show significant growth during the next two decades.

Clewiston began as a well planned venture, but the collapse of the Florida real estate boom, combined with the 1929 stock market crash, wreaked economic hardship on the city's continued development. On June 30, 1930, receivers were appointed to protect Southern Sugar's assets. Although the harvest was completed for the 1930-31 season, on April 28, 1931, a newly formed United States Sugar Corporation acquired the company's assets. Charles Steward Mott, of Flint, Michigan, and vice president of General Motors Corporation, was the principal stockholder and major creditor from the time Southern Sugar was in receivership. He became chairman of the board and controlling stockholder of the new corporation. He held the position until his death in 1973. Mott assisted in paying

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off debts and the reorganization of the company for a over a year before the company's financial and ownership situation was resolved. The company quickly recovered, and the 1933 harvest was the largest tonnage of sugar cane and raw sugar in the history of sugar cane cultivation in Florida. At the time, U.S. Sugar employed 4,000 workers in various capacities.

In 1931, the town established its independence from the United States Sugar Corporation by incorporating. The advent of a major dredging, lock, and dike project spurred by President Hoover to address the continual overflow and flooding of Lake Okeechobee provided a strong impetus to the local economy during the 1930s. After the great hurricanes in 1926 and 1928, the Okeechobee Flood Control & Navigation District had been established in 1929. Work started in 1930 and by August 15, 1935 the last gap of a dike, extending sixty-six miles around the lake was completed. The seven-year project, undertaken by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, provided more than a hundred government jobs and several hundred contract construction workers were taken on.

As a result of the dredging project, construction in Clewiston received a boost. Clewiston had been chosen as the headquarters for the federal flood control and navigational project in 1930. By 1934, a significant number of new residents arrived to work for the United States Corps of Engineers. The dredging project continued to be improved upon until 1936. As a result of the dredging, control of Lake Okeechobee was achieved. The St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Canal channels were made larger and improved. Work continued until 1937 when the Cross-State Waterway opened on March 22. Secretary of Commerce Daniel C. Roper was in attendance, and a large number of boats began a parade, traveling the 155-mile waterway from Stuart to Ft. Myers, making an overnight stop at Clewiston.

Clewiston's population stood at about 2,000 in 1929, and 2,500 in 1938-1939, but by the early 1940s, the population increased to above 3,000. The steady increase in population was not attributed solely to the Florida Boom but also was based on what was termed "a well-planned and conservative development of the natural resources of the territory." The entry for Clewiston in the 1939 WPA Guide to Florida describes a city with white stucco buildings, wide paved streets, a landscaped residential district, several parks with tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, and an emergency landing field, the only one in the county. The publication also mentions that there were several fishing camps that offered accommodations for sportsmen. The city had its own water and light plants, telephone company, 20-bed hospital, and a hotel. The water and light plants, telephone company, and Clewiston Inn remained under the ownership of the Clewiston Company, a subsidiary of the United States Sugar Corporation. There were four building firms building housing, a lumber mill, and at least one real estate agent.

With the population continuing to grow, more than \$300,000 in new building projects were completed in 1940. The most important building completed that year was the United States Sugar Office Building. Other buildings constructed that year included: a new post office; scheduled for completion in early 1941; a new office for Hendry

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County Motors; a new liquor store and cocktail lounge on Sugarland; the Thompson Auto Supply business building on Francisco; a two-unit expansion of the Sugarland Tourist Camp (non-extant); a new Gulf Oil Company metal warehouse; and a combination plumbing shop and residence. New businesses started up including: The Toggery Shop, and the Bishop-Wilson Lumber Co. In addition, a number of attractive bungalows were constructed by residents, most being five-room bungalows, with some smaller but others as large as six or seven rooms.

History of Local Theaters and the Dixie Crystal Theatre

Beginning about 1917, several theaters were established in the Lake Okeechobee region and nearby LaBelle. In 1923, Mary Hayes Davis, owner and editor of Hendry County New, the newspaper in the nearby town of LaBelle, had a tin building (non-extant) erected for the showing of movies in that city next to her printing plant on N. Bridge Street. This constituted "LaBelle's first theater and the first theater in Hendry County. The theater featured more than \$1,000 worth of "opera chairs." The picture shown at the opening was a western. In January, 1928, Davis's LaBelle Theater was sold to F. Watts Hall. In the mid to late-1920s, J.G. Anastasio also showed movies in LaBelle, in a former livery stable (non-extant) identified as the Columbia Theater, which was traded in a real estate deal in 1930 to H.I. Brewer of Michigan.

In about 1928, Mrs. Davis commissioned a new theater to be built in LaBelle (non-extant). That theater was two-stories high and measured 32 x 72 feet. Surrounding the screen was a painted mural of a Florida coastal scene with palms and blue surf. The walls and ceiling were paneled with Celotex, acclaimed for its acoustic properties. Hendry County's first showing of a sound-on film talkie was shown in September, 1931. The LaBelle Theater continued in operation until the early 1960s, but the building was demolished in the early 1970s.

Although a theater existed in nearby Moore Haven (Glades County) from about 1917, that theater was destroyed in a fire in 1921. Everglades pioneer, C.C. Klutts, constructed a new theater (non-extant) on Avenue J in that city in 1926. In early 1927, Klutts also commissioned LaBelle builder E.R. Burchard, to construct another theater, the Glatex Theater (non-extant) in Clewiston on the south side of Sugarland Highway, near Francisco Street and approximately one-half mile east of the subject theater. The theater opened in April, 1927. This theater had a seating capacity of 250 and was and is considered Clewiston's "pioneer playhouse." Although it was built primarily for the exhibition of motion pictures, it contained stage room for dramatic performances. At other times, traveling companies were booked and local benefits by amateur performers were given. Usually, motion pictures were shown at the Glatex three nights a week, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Apparently the theater only operated for a few years. In 1932, Klutts announced that he would build another theater in Clewiston, the Glades Theater on the south side of Sugarland Highway. But it appears that Klutts never followed through with his plans, because in 1934, Mary Hayes Davis completed the first Dixie Crystal Theatre (extant, albeit considerably altered) in Clewiston. This masonry

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vernacular building was built on the north side of Sugarland Highway. It gained its name in response to the major sugar production that took place in the area.

In 1940, another theater very similar in design, The Prince (extant), in nearby Pahokee (Palm Beach County) was completed and opened. It continued in operation as a motion picture theater until the early 1960s. This theater differed from the earlier theaters in the area as it was designed in the "Art Deco" style, whereas, the other theaters were much more vernacular in nature, some actually occupying corrugated metal buildings, while others were located in simple masonry vernacular commercial structures.

Sometime prior to September, 1940, Mary Hayes Davis commissioned West Palm Beach and Palm Beach architect C.A. Cone, who was also the designer of the Prince Theatre in Pahokee, to design a new Dixie Crystal Theater for her. The new theater was to be sited at the corner of Sugarland Highway and Central Avenue, west of the city's two earlier theaters. By October, Hayes had hired the Earl Anderson Contracting Company of Ft. Myers and Lakeland as her contractor. The building was to be approximately forty-five feet wide and ninety-three feet long and face the highway and was to cost \$20,000. By January, 1941 the building was near completion, and most likely opened shortly thereafter.

Within only a few years, but prior to World War II, Clewiston resident Urban T. Cook, Sr. was responsible for the operation of the Dixie Crystal. Cook and his wife Jane were both active in local affairs. The theater has remained in constant operation over the years as the sole motion picture theater in the two county area of Hendry and Glades Counties after the 1960s.

Mary Hayes Davis

Mary Hayes Davis, who commissioned the construction of both the first and second Dixie Crystal Theatres in Clewiston, this being the second, was a pioneer newspaper publisher and editor who left her mark in the field in both Hendry and Glades Counties. Hayes, a former resident of Pittsburgh, served as chief copy writer in the advertising department of Kaufman's, a large department store, and later went to work in the same capacity for the same firm in St. Louis. Following her employment with the store in St. Louis, she worked for the Associated Press. Hayes later moved to Kansas where she wrote a book on Indian lore (title unknown but perhaps "In the Real of Make Believe"). She also studied Chinese, translated old Chinese poems, and published a hard-back volume of them.

In about 1920, she came to Florida where she planned to buy an orange grove, but instead became employed as a reporter at the Polk County Democrat at Bartow. She moved to LaBelle, Florida, about 1923, where she became active in the division and formation of Hendry County. She served as the Secretary of the local Chamber of Commerce and was formally appointed publicity agent for Hendry County by the Hendry County Commission in 1923 after the

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county came into existence. By about 1925, she became editor of the local paper, the LaBelle Current. In 1927, she received the coveted award of the Florida Press Association for Best Community News Coverage, the Tampa Times, wrote that the award was “a deserved tribute to a very capable, quite womanly woman, who has rendered conspicuous service to her community. Florida would be better off if it had many more citizens and editors like Mary Hayes Davis.” In 1929, Davis became the editor and publisher of the Hendry County News, and became active in LaBelle civic and social activities.

Beginning in 1923, Davis had expanded her business interests into motion picture theaters. Over time, she built or acquired a chain of seven theaters in LaBelle, Naples, Venice, Moore Haven, Pompano, Clewiston and Fort Myers Beach. Sometime between 1935 and 1937, with her theaters having proved profitable, Davis sold her interest in the Hendry County News to Clewiston mayor, Captain F. Dean Duff, who turned over the operation of the paper to Keathley and Beryl Bowden. Davis died on May 18, 1948 in Ft. Myers Beach, Florida.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The modern movement of architecture began in the late 19th century in opposition to the eclectic architecture that was then prevalent. The Modernistic styles received their first major attention in 1922 as a result of a Chicago Tribune world-wide competition for a headquarters building in Chicago. Although a Gothic design was ultimately used, second prize went to a Finnish architect for his Art Deco design. The style turned away from past historical styles toward designs of buildings that expressed their own time. The style quickly became the latest architectural fashion. The modern movement became firmly established in the 1920s and 1930s not only in the United States but also in Europe and elsewhere. Within a short time after the 1930s, a more widely modern form affected the Modernistic style, one that initiated streamlined industrial designs for ships, airplanes, and automobiles.

In Art Deco and Moderne architecture, the use of simple cubic forms and flat surfaces is emphasized for their modernity. Whereas in Art Deco architecture (1925-1933), ornament is recognized for a pronounced vertical form and linear lines, faceted surfaces, zigzags, chevron patterns and octagon shapes, Modernistic buildings (post 1930) are drastically stripped of surface ornament. Facades of these buildings are symmetrical, modishly streamlined, using smooth and shiny surfaces and planes. Ornament is sparse and abstract. Wall surfaces are usually smooth and of stucco with small copings at the roof line. Often one or more corners of the building may be curved. Such styles were built from about 1920 to 1940. After about 1930, the Art Moderne style became the most common Modernistic form. With its smooth surfaces, curved corners, and horizontal emphasis, the style gave the feeling that air streams could move smoothly over these buildings. Some examples resembled the International Style in which decorative detailing was reduced to the bare minimum.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

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The Dixie Crystal Theatre is the only building of its style ever constructed in Clewiston. The only other Art Moderne influenced construction project in Clewiston involved a showroom addition to the 1927 Clewiston Motor Company, by then the Kelly Tractor Company office building. Clewiston has remained essentially a rural community since its early settlement. Located sixty miles from any major city, its architecture has retained influences reflecting middle America and has never undergone the outside influences that commonly impact more urbanized areas. Occupying a prominent site in Clewiston, along its main thoroughfare, the minimally altered the Dixie Crystal Theatre provides a wonderfully preserved example of the Art Moderne style rarely executed in the Lake Okeechobee region and other rural areas of Florida.

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DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE
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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Boundary Description

Block 358, Lot 1, Clewiston, Florida

Boundary Justification

The boundaries have been established based on the boundaries that have historically been associated with the property.

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PHOTO INVENTORY

1. Dixie Crystal Theatre, Clewiston, Florida
2. Hendry, Florida.
3. Mikki Hartig.
4. February, 1997
5. Historical and Architectural Research Services
6. Main facade, camera facing south
7. 1 of 7

Items 1-5 are the same for remaining photographs.

6. Main facade, camera facing southwest
7. 2 of 7

6. East elevation, camera facing west
7. 3 of 7

6. Marquee and cashiers cage, camera facing southeast
7. 4 of 7

6. East elevation and rear facade, camera facing northwest
7. 5 of 7

6. West elevation and south shed roof addition, camera facing east
7. 6 of 7

6. West elevation and rear facade, camera facing northeast
7. 7 of 7

PONCE DE LEON AVENUE

CITY PARK

ROYAL PALM AVENUE



U.S. HIGHWAY 27 (S.R. 80)



CENTRAL AVENUE

CENTRAL AVENUE

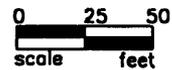


DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE

PARKING



DIXIE CRYSTAL THEATRE
(CLEWISTON THEATER)
CLEWISTON (HENDRY COUNTY), FLORIDA



← 6 PHOTO LOCATIONS

